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Jane Hokanson Hawks

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FEELING AT HOME: DIMENSIONS OF FACULTY LIFE

Jane Hokanson Hawks

The themes identified by Walter Bouman in "What is the Lutheran Tradition?" at the "Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference II" helped me further define my role as a faculty member in a Lutheran institution. The Lutheran tradition has greatly influenced the person I have become during my lifetime.

My Lutheran Influence.

I was baptized, confirmed, and married in the Lutheran Church. Because I lived across the street from the church for most of my childhood, I played with the pastor's children and had good vantage point for watching all of the activities that took place at the church--both happy and sad.

When I left for college in 1973, I felt much more comfortable attending a small Lutheran college than a state university. Hence, I was delighted to receive an Aid Association for Lutherans Scholarship that helped bridge the money gap created by my desire to attend a more expensive Lutheran college. The BSN I received from St. Olaf College prepared me well for my new role as a professional nurse. However, after I graduated and began my career, I realized that I had received a very special education that provided me with much more than the credentials needed to practice as a nurse. I also had developed the skills needed to succeed in life, cope with difficult circumstances, and enjoy the fine arts.

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I practiced nursing for a few years before beginning a nursing education career that has now spanned eighteen years. I spent thirteen of those years as a faculty member at four non-church-related colleges and universities. It wasn't until I began my fifth teaching position at Midland Lutheran College five years ago, that I finally found a special place as a faculty member. It was almost like coming home. After listening to Dr. Bouman, I suddenly realized why teaching at a Lutheran institution feels so "right" for me and why it is something that should not be lost as we move into the next century.

Dr. Bouman's address helped me to see that helping students understand and cope with what it means to be human is what we do so well at Lutheran institutions of higher learning. The foundation for this success may be in the liberal arts course work, but it is also depicted in the day-to-day interactions that faculty have with students and other faculty. I can best illustrate this with three examples: the role of a member of the faculty organization, the role as a teacher, and the role as a nurse and teacher.

Role as Member of Faculty Organization.

First, I will address my role as a member of the faculty organization. I recently chaired an ad-hoc committee that developed a faculty mentoring program for Midland Lutheran College. Although we could identify key points under the areas of curricular, teaching, social, and political roles of faculty, the committee struggled with how to explain and foster the spiritual role as we oriented the mentors for the program. Dr. Bouman's presentation helped me solidify what the committee meant by the spiritual role. Dr. Bouman's assertion that the five themes are the way that Lutherans are involved in the argument about what it means to be human was a wonderful starting point. The mentoring committee used Dr. Bouman's assertion to orient the mentors and it seems to have worked well. I make this conclusion based on the initial (first two months) success of the mentoring program and the recent funding for the program from the Lilly Foundation.

The mentors and mentees have developed relationships built on caring and support that have reached across disciplines to create a greater sense of community. For example, when one of the mentors learned of the recent death of a mentee's father, he called the faculty member's mentor. The assigned mentor immediately went to find the mentee. He was standing at the front of the classroom writing on the chalkboard. The moment he saw the mentor, he left the class and went into the hallway. The mentor hugged the mentee. That hug expressed more than words could at that moment. Helping the mentee through the loss of a family member is an example of how faculty interact with other faculty in dealing with human emotions such as grief or joy.

Role as a Teacher.

All faculty, novice or expert, in liberal arts or professional disciplines, have a responsibility to facilitate the idea of what it means to be human with all students. Grief, joy, patience,

sorrow, and suffering are just examples of feelings and behaviors that can be explored in literature, nursing, business, music, journalism, chemistry, religion, and etc. classes. Only the approach used to examine these human feelings will differ with the class content being studied.

In college, students struggle with life situations and decisions. When given the opportunity, I have found that they enjoy discussing these events, decisions, and emotions because they have experienced many of them. As a teacher facilitates discussion of a musical performance or literature composition, it is easy to have students relate personal anecdotes that support the musical or literary message. Ethical questions can be addressed in business, journalism, nursing, and science courses.

Certainly, exploring what it means to be human in the classroom corresponds with the five themes outlined by Bouman. First of all, human feelings and behaviors were described in the Bible. Multiple references for study in the Bible can be found for those behaviors and feelings listed above. For example, grief is cited in Job 17:7; Proverbs 17:21; Jeremiah 8:18; Isaiah 53:4; and 2 Corinthians 7:9. Some of the citations concerning joy can be found in Psalms 4:7, 47:1, 51:2, 105:43, and 119:11; Isaiah 24:11, 35:10, 55:12, and 61:7; Matthew 2:10, 13:44, and 28:8; Acts 8:8; and John 3:29, 15:11, and 16:20. Matthew 18:26, Luke 8:15; Romans 8:25; and Hebrews 6:12 contain discussion of patience. Sorrow is cited in Proverbs 10:1; Ecclesiastes 7:3; Isaiah 35:10 and 53:3; Jeremiah 31:13 and 45:3; and John 16:20. Suffering appears in Romans 5:3; 2 Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 2:10; and 1 Peter 4:13. Citations of pride are found in Proverbs 16:18; Isaiah 2:11; Jeremiah 13:17; and Amos 6:8.

Secondly, the feelings and behaviors that humans experience are catholic in that they have been passed from generation to generation. Despite our human feelings and behaviors and their related struggles, we are saved by faith in God through his grace which ties us to Dr. Bouman's third point that Lutheranism is evangelical. Fourth, human feelings and behaviors are experienced with celebration of the sacraments. Whenever the Holy Eucharist or Holy Baptism are celebrated, we continue to experience what it means to be human and know that God is doing something through the human action of saying words, eating bread, drinking wine, or washing someone with water. Finally, to study what it means to be human is related to the fifth theme which Dr. Bouman states is world-affirming. This theme encompasses marriage as opposed to celibacy as well as the concept of vocation as a parent, spouse, farmer, teacher, laborer, or clergy being of equal importance for responsibility and

accountability are required in each case. Hence, these themes can also be tied into various classroom discussions.

Role as Nurse and Teacher

In nursing, helping students to understand what it means to be human is relatively easy because nurses experience humanness each day--the loneliness experienced by nursing home residents, the fear experienced by the hungry and homeless, the joy experienced by new parents, the grief experienced by the terminally ill, the loss experienced by one who has lost a leg, a breast or a loved one. Hence, in the classroom these situations and how to provide care and comfort are discussed. Also, ethical issues are frequently encountered. For example, how much care should a person who cannot pay for services receive? What kind of treatment should the 90 year old patient whose kidneys have failed receive? Finally, nurses have to look at a patient's cultural practices and religious beliefs and provide care accordingly. Students may pray with patients or offer to get the chaplain when providing care.

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As a nurse educator it is also important to deal with the student's feelings and behaviors--joy with successfully performing a procedure for the first time, grief experienced when preparing a dead client for the mortuary, sorrow experienced when disposing of an aborted fetus, and disappointment with the grade received on an examination.

Conclusion

During my years of teaching, I have observed that nursing students display tremendous growth and maturity as they progress through college. Perhaps the basis for this is that nursing students frequently encounter a variety of human emotions and behaviors. Hence, they regularly examine what it means to be human. I cannot think of a better setting for that experience than a Lutheran institution of higher education. No wonder I feel at home and am able to define my faculty role better! Thank you, Dr. Bouman!

Jane Hokanson Hawks is Assistant Professor of Nursing, Midland Lutheran College and Associate Editor, Urologic Nursing
